

'Consumer Reports' warns women about canned tuna

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By Elizabeth Weise, USA TODAY

Pregnant women should not eat canned tuna because a small percentage contains levels of methyl mercury as high as fish the Food and Drug Administration recommends pregnant women never eat, a *Consumer Reports* article warns Tuesday.

The consumer magazine staff analyzed testing information posted on the FDA's website in January. Most cans of light tuna contain on average 0.12 parts per million of mercury, while white or albacore tuna has on average about 0.35 parts per million. But 6% of light-tuna cans tested contained levels above 0.12 parts per million, some as high as 0.85 parts per million.

"FDA says pregnant women should never eat shark, swordfish, king mackerel or tilefish," says *Consumer Reports'* Jean Halloran. King mackerel averages 0.73 parts per million mercury, lower than some tuna, the FDA says.

"So if you were so unfortunate as to get one of these occasional high-mercury cans of tuna fish, you could get a mercury level comparable to a fish that FDA says you should never eat" if you're pregnant.

As fish get older and larger, they build up methyl mercury in their bodies. Light tuna comes from smaller, younger tuna, and white or albacore tuna comes from older, larger fish.

The FDA says that "high levels of mercury in the bloodstream of unborn babies and young children may harm the developing nervous system." It advises that women who might become pregnant and children can eat up to 12 ounces or two meals a week of canned tuna and that one of those may be white or albacore tuna.

The FDA says that although some canned tuna may contain higher mercury levels, some are lower, and scientists took averages into account in the recommendations.

"I haven't seen science that a single serving of a higher level would be of concern," says David Acheson, chief medical officer of the FDA's Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition.

"Mercury is very much a chronic-exposure concern. You build up the levels in the blood, and that seems to be the problem."

Men and those women not likely to get pregnant shouldn't forgo the cardiovascular protection that eating fish can provide, says Richard Forshee of the University of Maryland's Center for Food, Nutrition and Agriculture Policy.